



2024 Public Affairs Pulse Survey Report

What Americans Think about Business and Government

Executive Summary

The 2024 Public Affairs Pulse Survey — conducted Sept. 1-3 by Morning Consult — provides an in-depth look at American public opinion on challenges and issues facing business, government and society. This year we explored concerns about election integrity, the potential for political violence, the impact of disinformation, distrust of political news, political party views about business, and how Americans view corporate political involvement.

Just 36% believe the 2024 elections will be honest and open to rightful voters, while 44% have serious doubts about honesty and openness. As in 2023, Democrats are far more optimistic about the integrity and fairness of the elections than are Republicans and independents.

Four out of 10 Americans (41%) believe there will be violent protests no matter who wins the presidential election, and nearly half the country (49%) expects violence if Donald Trump loses. Three out of 10 Americans (29%) believe significant violence would occur following a Kamala Harris victory.

More than two-thirds of Americans (68%) believe disinformation will affect the outcome of the elections — either “somewhat” or “significantly.” Only 4% believe disinformation won't be a factor at all.

The most likely sources of disinformation are expected to be (in order) Republican candidates, the news media and Democratic candidates. Concern about disinformation increases with age, education level and household income.

Americans want the next U.S. President to be “truthful,” “law-abiding” and “intelligent.” When asked which of 14 leadership traits were most important for the job, Republicans, Democrats and independents included these three qualities in their top four choices.

The Democratic Party is now considered a more trustworthy source of political news than the news media. Next to “friends and family,” the highest-rated source was the Democratic Party, followed by associations, the news media, business, conservative groups and the Republican Party.

Most Americans (57%) still consider the Republican Party to be more pro-business than the Democratic Party. Yet Republicans are more likely than Democrats to label every major industry as untrustworthy, are more critical of business performance and service, and strongly oppose corporate involvement in social issues.

What sets the GOP apart is that Republicans are consistently opposed to new regulations in the same nine industries they say they don't trust. Democrats take the opposite stance — they consistently believe a sector is more in need of regulation than does the average American.

Companies that explain they are lobbying to protect company jobs, create a level playing field, or support social causes garner the highest approval levels for their political involvement activities.

And finally, Political Action Committees (PACs) gained six percentage points in popularity this year, which means 57% of the American public now consider them an acceptable way to fund elections.

Many Americans Expect Elections Will Lack Integrity

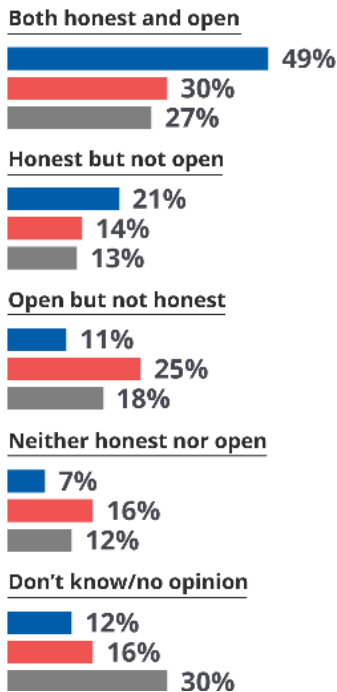
Just 36% of Americans believe the 2024 U.S. elections will be conducted honestly and will be open to all rightful voters, while 44% have serious doubts about honesty, openness, or both. These results from the 2024 Public Affairs Pulse survey are no more optimistic than they were last year.

Only 25% of young adults (aged 18-34) have faith in the honesty and openness of the elections, but hopefulness increases with age. Forty-four percent (44%) of Americans aged 65 and older believe the elections will be both honest and open.

As in 2023, Democrats are far more optimistic about the integrity and fairness of the elections than are Republicans or independents. Nearly half (49%) of Democrats believe the elections will be both honest and open, compared to 30% of Republicans and 27% of independents.

Honesty and Openness of 2024 Elections

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents



Democrats are more worried about whether the 2024 elections will be sufficiently open to all registered voters than they are about the honesty of the vote-counting process. Republicans, however, are more pessimistic about election integrity. While just 7% of Democrats are skeptical of both honesty and openness, more than twice as many Republicans (16%) believe the 2024 elections will fail on both counts.

Major Concerns About Violence, Particularly if Trump Loses

Four out of 10 Americans (41%) believe there will be violent protests no matter who wins the presidential election, and nearly half the country (49%) expects violence if Donald Trump loses. Three out of 10 Americans (29%) believe *significant violence* will occur following a Kamala Harris victory.

Likelihood of Protests and Violence After 2024 Elections

	Trump Wins	Harris Wins
Protests with significant violence	21%	29%
Protests with moderate violence	20%	20%
Protests with no violence	21%	15%
No major protests	20%	18%
Don't know/no opinion	19%	19%

Democrats are particularly worried about violence after a Trump loss, with 57% expecting violence and 37% believing it will be significant. Americans aged 65 and older are also more concerned than other age groups, with 54% expecting violence and 32% anticipating significant violence.

Whether violence erupts or not, most Americans still expect protests following election day. Overall, 62% of U.S. adults believe protests will take place if Trump wins and 64% expect protests after a Harris victory.

Public Most Worried About Disinformation from Candidates

More than two-third of Americans (68%) believe disinformation will affect the outcome of the elections — either “somewhat” or “significantly” — compared with 63% last year at this time. Only 4% believe disinformation won't be a factor at all.

Concern about disinformation increases with age, education level and income. For example, while only 27% of those aged 18-34 believe disinformation will be a significant factor in the elections, 42% of Americans aged 65 and older believe it will have a major impact. Men are more likely to worry about the impact of disinformation (36%) than are women (31%). Among Democrats and Republicans, almost equal percentages (34% vs. 36%) are concerned that disinformation will have a significant impact. Supporters of either party are considerably more worried about disinformation than are independents.

In the 2023 Pulse Survey, the two most likely sources of election disinformation were said to be social media and the news media. In 2024, “Republican candidates” leapfrogged over those factors and — with a score of 40% — is now considered to be the most likely source of disinformation. Last year “Republican candidates” was selected as a major disinformation source by only 32% of respondents.

Most Likely Sources of Disinformation in 2024 Elections

	2024	2023
Republican Candidates	40%	32%
News Media	36%	40%
Democratic Candidates	32%	28%
Social Media	27%	42%
Super PACs	17%	20%
Foreign Governments	11%	11%
Major Companies	4%	6%

The news media is in second place in the 2024 survey with a score of 36%, down from 40% in 2023. Democratic candidates, like their counterparts in the GOP, also received a worse score for disinformation in 2024 (32%) than in 2023 (28%). This earned the Democrats the distinction as the third-most-likely source of disinformation about the elections.

Meta’s Limitations on Political Posts May be Helping

Social media giant Meta has been criticized for making it too easy for political disinformation to be spread on its networks, which is why it has moved to limit access to political content on Facebook, Instagram and Threads. Based on the results of the new Pulse Survey, the company’s efforts may be working. While 42% of Americans selected social media as a main source of election disinformation in 2023, that percentage dropped sharply to 27% in 2024. Social media also improved its score as a *trustworthy* source of political information by 4 percentage points this past year.

On the other hand, when Americans were asked which methods of spreading disinformation about the 2024 elections worried them the most, the most frequent answer (40%) was social media posts. Based on answers to the question about disinformation sources, perhaps the public is chiefly concerned about candidates spreading disinformation via social media, rather than the social media networks themselves. The second most worrisome method was news coverage, with a score of 33%, followed by artificial intelligence at 27% (up from only 18% in 2023).

Americans Untroubled by Disinformation Threat from Foreign Governments

Only 11% of Americans believe foreign governments (including Russia, which was recently accused of secretly funding a U.S. media company) are a major source of election disinformation. This represents the same level of concern about foreign involvement revealed in last year’s Pulse Survey.

Lack of concern about this sort of foreign influence is strongest among Republicans, of which only 8% believe foreign governments are a main source of election disinformation. While almost twice as many Democrats (15%) are worried about foreign sources of disinformation, neither group seems terribly concerned about disinformation from Russia and other adversaries.

What Traits Are We Looking for in Next U.S. President?

The Pulse Survey asked the public to consider 14 leadership traits and designate two as “most important” when electing a U.S. President. In first place, by an extremely wide margin, is “Truthful,” which was selected by 63% of respondents. This trait scored above 60% for just about everyone including Democrats, Republicans and independents. Among different age groups, truthfulness matters most to people aged 65 and older (74%).

Most Important Presidential Traits by Political Party Affiliation

Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Truthful 65%	Truthful 61%	Truthful 64%
Law-Abiding 38%	Intelligent 32%	Intelligent 27%
Intelligent 29%	Hardworking 29%	Law-Abiding 26%
Respectful 24%	Law-Abiding 22%	Hardworking 23%

The second most popular trait is “Law-Abiding,” though only 30% of respondents picked that answer option. The two major political parties did rank “Law-Abiding” differently. While 38% of Democrats say “Law-Abiding” is one of the two most important characteristics of a good president, only 22% of Republicans and 26% of independents agree.

The accompanying chart shows how Democrats, Republicans and independents rank the traits they consider most important for a U.S. president. Yes, there are differences (as we noted in

the above discussion about “Law-Abiding”), but there are also remarkable similarities. Three traits — Truthful, Law-Abiding and Intelligent — appear in the top four choices for all three political groups.

Democrats Are Winning Political Information Wars

In what may be a first in the history of American opinion polling, a major U.S. political party is now considered a more trustworthy source of political news than the news media. Since that political party is the Democratic Party, this finding indicates

Who is Most Trusted for Political News and Information?

	2024	2023
Friends and Family	67%	68%
Democratic Party	42%	39%
Associations	41%	41%
News Media	40%	41%
Business	39%	43%
Conservative Groups	35%	36%
Republican Party	35%	35%
Social Media	35%	31%
Liberal Groups	32%	33%
Political Campaigns	29%	24%
Super PACs	20%	21%

Democrats have been more successful than Republicans at connecting with voters and convincing them they can be counted on for reliable information during an important election year. The Democratic Party is now in second place for political news trustworthiness, behind “Friends and Family,” which has consistently been named the most trustworthy source in this annual ranking.

Not surprisingly, some of these trust percentages differ greatly when the responses are sorted by political party affiliation. For example, while 57% of Democrats trust the news media, only 30% of Republicans and 29% of independents agree. Independents don’t place a lot of trust in either major political party: 26% trust information from the Democratic Party, and 21% trust information from the Republican Party.

The following is a list of demographic groups that have a high level of trust in news and information from the Democratic Party:

77% of Democratic men

75% of Democratic women

71% of Liberals

54% of Black Americans

53% of those with a post-graduate degree

Demographic groups with high trust in news and information from the Republican Party include:

72% of Republican men

71% of Republican women

66% of Conservatives

49% of Evangelical Christians

44% of Self-employed people

In addition to these findings about trust, the sharp, four-point drop in the standing of business as a major source of political news and information is also worth noting. While last year business was in second place with a trust score of 43%, this year it slid into fifth place with a score of 39%.

With Friends Like These, Who Needs Political Opponents?

The U.S. business community has experienced a decline in trust this past year, and evidence is showing up in numerous places. These include not only a decline in trust as a source for political news and information, but also lower scores in other metrics for performance and trustworthiness.

For example, each year we ask the public whether major companies are “doing a good job” in eight activities in which companies engage, from creating jobs and paying employees fairly to providing useful products and services and serving customers. This year, major companies scored lower in all eight categories, with decreases ranging from two to seven percentage points.

Where Are Major Companies Doing a Good Job?

	2024	2023
Providing Useful Products and Services	54%	60%
Serving Customers	49%	53%
Serving Stockholders	44%	47%
Creating Jobs	43%	50%
Paying Employees Fairly	31%	37%
Supporting Local Communities	30%	34%
Protecting Environment	26%	31%
Paying Top Executives Fairly, But Not Overpaying	24%	26%

Now let's look at the percentage of Americans who view a given industry as more untrustworthy than average. For example, last year 37% said the pharmaceutical industry was more untrustworthy than other industries, and this year the percentage rose to 43%. While the nine sectors studied received rankings in 2024 that were similar to what they received in 2023, all experienced an increase in distrust that amounted to a six to seven percentage point difference.

Which Industries Are Considered Most Untrustworthy

	2024	2023
Pharmaceuticals	43%	37%
Health Insurance	40%	33%
Energy	32%	27%
Banks and Financial Institutions	31%	25%
Technology	30%	24%
Automobiles	26%	19%
Large Retail	25%	19%
Food and Beverage	22%	15%
Manufacturing	22%	16%

There are many possible explanations for this change. Is it just a regression to the mean (i.e., in 2023 trust scores for all nine sectors improved, so perhaps they are returning to "normal")? Did it result from criticism of corporate ESG and DEI programs? Or could it be public anger about higher prices for consumer goods?

Republicans Are Considered More Pro-Business

On the one hand, 57% of Americans still consider the Republican Party to be pro-business, while only 43% believe the Democratic Party is pro-business. Last year 59% said the GOP was pro-business, and the same percentage as this year (43%) gave that moniker to the Democrats.

On the other hand, 69% of Democrats now say their party is pro-business and only 49% say Republicans are pro-business. While 75% of Republicans believe their party is the pro-business party, only 21% would use that description for the Democratic Party.

Could it be the two major political parties are competing to be known as the more business-friendly party, even if some of their policies and statements work against the interests of business, or are critical of business performance?

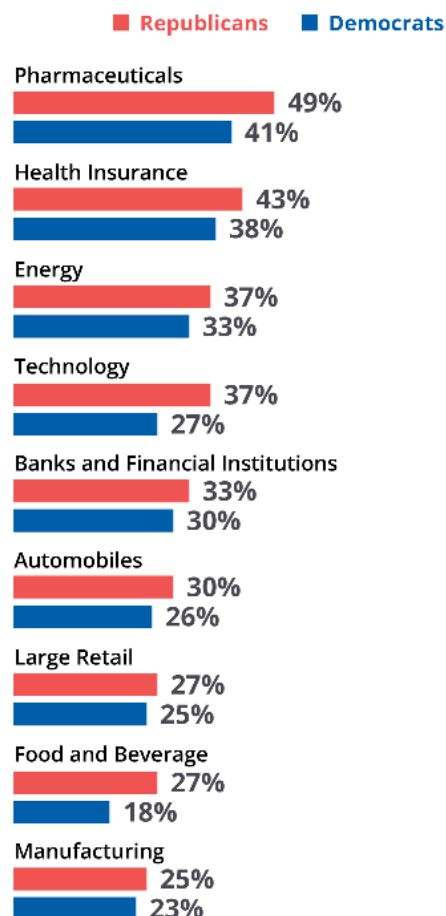
GOP is More Distrustful Across Nine Industry Sectors

Let's look again at data on the perceived untrustworthiness of various industries, but this time we'll sort it by political party affiliation. Given the pro-business reputation of the GOP, the first major surprise we find is that Republicans are more distrustful of major companies in all nine sectors, from Pharmaceuticals to Manufacturing.

For instance, while 37% of Republicans view tech companies as more untrustworthy than average, only 27% of Democrats agree. That amounts to a 10 percentage-point difference on the issue of distrust. Another way to state this last finding is that, among Republicans, the Tech sector is tied for the third-least trustworthy industry. But among Democrats, the Tech sector is the fifth-least trustworthy industry.

Additional evidence to support the notion that the GOP is no longer the "party of business" can be found in the Pulse Survey data about corporate engagement in social issues. As we noted last year, it's striking how strongly Democrats support corporate efforts to engage politically on social issues and how strongly Republicans oppose them.

Most Untrustworthy Industries By Political Party Affiliation



Public Support is Rising for Social Issue Engagement

Despite backlash from Republican leaders and candidates who have called major companies too “woke” for supporting social issues, public expectations for engagement in these issues has

Support for Business Engagement in Social Issues

	2024	2023
Support environment/sustainability	66%	61%
Ending hunger and supporting food security	64%	58%
Ending discrimination by race	62%	57%
Ending discrimination by gender	61%	58%
Supporting access to quality education	61%	55%
Expanding human rights	60%	54%
Expanding voting rights	47%	42%
Ending discrimination by sexual orientation	58%	56%
Ending discrimination by gender identity	57%	53%
Increasing affordable housing	55%	51%
Supporting DACA	41%	41%
Supporting legal access to abortions	39%	36%

increased in the past year. Of the 12 social issues listed in the Pulse Survey, 11 saw increases in public support for corporate engagement. Support for the remaining issue — creating pathways to citizenship for people brought illegally to the U.S. as children through the DACA program — remained steady at 41%.

When responses are sorted by political affiliation, huge differences of opinion are apparent. For the 12 issues, the approval gaps between Democrats and Republicans range from 13 percentage points (education and food security) to 27 percentage points (legal access to abortions). Other social issues with large deltas include ending discrimination by gender identity (26 percentage points) and supporting DACA (25 percentage points).

Why, then, do so many Americans believe the Republican Party is pro-business? GOP voters are more likely to criticize many aspects of business performance and service, from providing useful products and services to paying employees fairly. They are more likely to label companies — in every major sector —

as being more untrustworthy than average. And, finally, most of them strongly oppose corporate involvement in social issues, even when companies have been working on those issues for decades.

The answer lies in Republicans’ instinctive dislike and distrust of government regulation.

Appetite Increases for More Business Regulation

Each year we ask Pulse Survey respondents to score each of the same nine industries for whether they are more in need of regulation than are other industries. In 2024, the pharmaceutical industry is once again considered the sector most in need of regulation, followed by health insurance. Energy comes in third rather than fourth this year. The biggest change, however, involves the Food and Beverage Industry, which was considered the sector least in need of more regulation last year (ninth out of 9), but this year it is in sixth place out of 9 industries.

Even when many Americans believe a sector is underregulated, Republicans often are satisfied with the current regulatory level or may even consider that industry too burdened by regulations. For example, 33% of the public currently think the energy sector is underregulated and only 20% think it is overregulated. GOP voters disagree, with 30% saying it is overregulated and only 26% considering it underregulated.

Democrats, meanwhile, take the opposite stance — they consistently believe a given sector is more in need of regulation than does the average American. In the case of energy, 43% of Democrats would like to see more regulation and only 12% think government is already regulating that sector too much. And yet, as we saw in an earlier chart, 37% of Republicans find the energy industry more untrustworthy than average — which is four percentage points worse than what Democrats believe!

Which Industries Need More Government Oversight?

	2024	2023
Pharmaceuticals	40%	37%
Health Insurance	37%	34%
Energy	33%	30%
Tech	31%	31%
Banks and Financial Institutions	29%	28%
Food and Beverage	27%	21%
Manufacturing	26%	23%
Large Retail	26%	23%
Automobiles	24%	21%

And so, what we have are two political parties that view themselves as pro-business. The first doesn't seem to like or trust major companies very much but has a strong bias against regulation. The second trusts corporations more and clearly likes their products, services and engagement in social issues, but has a strong bias in favor of more regulation.

Sorting Out Public Opinion on Business Regulation

How does the country as a whole view regulation?

Every year since the Pulse Survey was launched in 2011, we have asked Americans to pick which of the following two statements comes closest to their view:

Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest.

Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.

Responses have varied widely over the years. When the U.S. seems to be leaning leftward, more people say regulation protects the public interest. When the country is leaning rightward, more people say regulation does more harm than good. As this chart shows, the U.S. has remained in the pro-regulation lane since the last presidential election year.

Moreover, since 2022 the percentage of Americans believing regulation “does more harm than good” has dropped from 28%

Is Business Regulation Helpful or Harmful?

	2024	2022	2020
Necessary to protect public interest	33%	32%	32%
Does more harm than good	23%	28%	22%
Margin	10	4	10

to 23%, and the percentage saying it “is necessary to protect the public interest” has risen from 32% to 33%. In other words, the margin favoring the Democrats’ views on regulation has widened from four percentage points to 10 percentage points.

How Americans View Corporate Political Involvement

The right “to petition government for the redress of grievances” is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but that doesn’t mean political advocacy is always viewed positively — especially when the advocate is a large corporation.

Over the years, the Pulse Survey has asked Americans how they view different types of corporate political activity to determine where the public’s concerns lie and how to address them.

Public Supports Lobbying to Create Jobs, Level Playing Field

This year we posed a series of questions covering different reasons for a company to lobby elected representatives, regulators and other government officials. Previous surveys have shown that varies public acceptance of corporate advocacy

Approval Levels for Different Types of Lobbying

	2024	2019
Protecting company jobs	54%	62%
Creating a level playing field	50%	54%
Supporting social causes	49%	53%
Opening new markets	45%	48%
Reducing business costs	45%	47%
Securing government funding or grants	39%	38%

varies widely depending on the purpose of that advocacy. While this year’s survey supports that conclusion, it also reveals growing skepticism of business lobbying in general.

According to the 2024 Pulse Survey, the most acceptable type of lobbying is advocacy designed to protect company jobs, which is supported by 54% of the public and opposed by only 18%. When we last fielded this question in 2019, 62% of the public found this type of lobbying acceptable.

In second place was lobbying to create a level playing field with competitors, which was supported by 50% of respondents and opposed by only 19%. In third place was lobbying to support social causes, which was favored by 49% and opposed by 23%. As the above chart shows, those two lobbying types were supported by more than 50% of the public in 2019.

When one scrolls down the list of reasons for lobbying, it’s notable that all of them — including “lobbying to secure government funding” — were deemed appropriate to varying degrees.

Both Republicans and Democrats Support PACs

Americans have been remarkably consistent in how they rank different campaign funding methods. For the seventh straight year, the most acceptable way to fund campaigns is for candidates to spend their own money, though that strategy dropped three percentage points in popularity to 63%.

Holding steady in second place at 62% are individual contributions. In third place, but with a six percentage-point gain and a score of 57%, are political action committees (PACs).

When the data on PACs are sorted by political party, the numbers are striking: 61% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans now support PACs, and only 16% of Democrats and 18% of Republicans believe PACs should not be a source of campaign funding. Support is especially strong among Democratic men, of which 65% now support PACs.

Most Acceptable Ways To Fund Campaigns

	2024	2023
Candidate Spending Own Money	63%	66%
Individual Contributions	62%	62%
PACs	57%	51%
Super PACs	45%	42%
Federal Tax Dollars	37%	35%

Backing for PACs is strong among all age groups including those aged 18-34 (55%) and 35-44 (56%).

Trailing again this year were super PACs, which were considered acceptable by 45% of the public, and the use of federal tax dollars to fund elections, which was supported by only 37% of the public.



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About the Public Affairs Council

Both nonpartisan and nonpolitical, the Public Affairs Council is the leading association for public affairs professionals worldwide. The Council's mission is to advance the field of public affairs and to provide its more than 750 member companies and associations with the executive education and expertise they need to succeed while maintaining the highest ethical standards. Learn more about the Council at pac.org.

Methodology: This poll was conducted between September 1-September 3, 2024 among a sample of 2,205 Adults. The interviews were conducted online and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of Adults based on age, gender, race, educational attainment, region, gender by age, and race by educational attainment. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.